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Information-Gathering by the CIA

In a recent issue of *Science* [136, 173 (13 Apr. 1962)] Patrick D. Wall reported that he declined to disclose to a representative of the Central Intelligence Agency information as to the direction being taken by certain foreign scientists in the field of neurophysiology, because (i) one should reasonably ask the questioner to share the same ethics and tell you specifically for what purpose he intends to use the information, a professor being required to remain in a position to assess the consequences of his profession, and (ii) a consequence of a relationship with the CIA would be to limit the freedom of discussion between American and foreign colleagues by increasing the danger that American scientists will be regarded as government agents. Wall says that if a colleague had asked him for this information he would have replied without hesitation.

Wall could deal with the situation, although perhaps somewhat deviously, by disclosing the requested information without reporting the fact to his foreign colleagues, some of whom he characterizes as certainly part-time intelligence agents. This would minimize the hazard of impairing the usually free exchange and argument of a scientific discussion, which he properly prizes. But this does not meet his first objection.

Not all of us can share Wall's conviction that undisclosed purposes of the United States Government are evil. Even he probably does not, in order to preclude disclosure to the government, require a specific statement of purpose on the part of every colleague and student and every reader of any periodical in which his work may be published. We thus come to a practical difficulty in the application of his principles. Can he really be sure that no colleague, student, or reader will disclose information to the United States Government? Is it not even possible that one of them may be an American agent in disguise? The only effective way to preserve security would be to refrain from talking about his work to anyone or, on the assumption that the Central Intelligence Agency and other government agencies are as subtle as he believes, to refrain from doing any scientific work at all.

But this is not the end of the problem. I was once consulted by a gentleman who was oppressed by the consciousness that the Federal Bureau of Investigation was telepathically prying into his thoughts. This raises the question of whether, in addition to refraining from talking about scientific work or engaging in it, we ought not avoid thinking about it. As a fellow who sometimes puts himself to sleep at night by working out simple topological problems in his head, I would hesitate to adopt a policy which would condemn me to wakefulness during my nonworking hours.

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The good will and good intentions of the government are not in question. What is in question is the price we are paying for the CIA's questioning of scientists. It is generally agreed that secret classification of projects and wiretapping should be limited, since they increase mistrust and suspicion and diminish freedom of communication. It is to be hoped that the good sense of the government and the scientists will limit CIA information gathering, because we are paying a price for it, too. The government has tremendous in-house capabilities for collecting information from the many very able government scientists. Only when this source is exhausted should university scientists be consulted and then only after careful consideration of the price paid for the information [illegible] munication between [illegible]

Kingsley offers [illegible]

to avoid the issue. But secrecy provides little practical protection. The widespread questioning of scientists by the CIA is now so well known that it is no longer possible to hide its general existence. The specific information handed over may, indeed, remain secret, but the needs of society change, and we have all seen yesterday's secret files become today's subpoenaed public evidence. Kingsley's second answer to the issue suggests that the problem of personal responsibility no longer exists. I am relieved to learn that, because others are willing to hand on information, it is therefore all right for me to do so. It is ironical that Kingsley should write his letter on Patriots' Day, since now, as in that celebrated time, a man must examine his conscience when asked to become an informer.

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